Summary

The Historic Belén Bioarchaeology Project is a conservation effort, on private land. The overarching goals are to delineate the original mission church foundation, to recover and subsequently repatriate individuals buried in and around the mission church, and to learn about the effects of colonialism on indigenous groups. The project was initiated by the landowners and other descendant community members who want the site preserved as a historic monument to their ancestors as well as the early indigenous groups living in the area. Bioarchaeologists, historians and descendant community members are working together to excavate and conserve the ancestors remains, to bring forward this important piece of Belén history.

For more information or questions please contact:

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We want to thank all the field crew, students, and volunteers who have assisted with excavations, as well as the Torres and O'Neal families, and the greater community of Belén, New Mexico, for their generous support and continued participation in this project

This project is supported by ***The National Science Foundation under Grant No. 2051184.***

Additional funding for this project has been awarded by: The Carryl B. Martin Research Award through the Arizona Archaeological and Historical Society, the PaleoWest Foundation, the American Association of University Women, the Arizona Archaeological and Historical Society Travel Grant, the Friends of World Anthropology Scholarship through the UNLV Anthropology Department, and the UNLV GPSA Summer Sponsorship Fund.

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[i] *The Historic Belén Bioarchaeology Project* is a project conducted on private property, not federal or tribal land. Our excavations are required to follow New Mexico State law, *The Cultural Properties Act* (Section 18-6-11.2), implementing rule 4.10.11.10/11/12/13. New Mexico Administrative Code for the excavation of unmarked human remains. Under NM state statute and rule, the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) is responsible for, and has control over, unmarked human remains after excavation and during examination, as the remains must stay within the state of New Mexico as a condition of the unmarked burial excavation permit. This makes the SHPO the custodian of all the remains excavated from the site. Every year of excavations, human remains and associated grave goods will be curated with the SHPO, until the end of the project.

[ii] Repatriation and reburial at the end of the project, of all human remains and associated grave goods, will be conducted in the cemetery on the grounds of Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church. These arrangements have been made possible by the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.

[iii] Sisneros, Samuel E., "The Colonial Mission Pueblo of Belén," chapter six in *Nación Genízara: Ethnogenesis, Place and Identity in New Mexico*, Ed. Moises Gonzales and Enrique Lamadrid, UNM Press, 2019

[iv] Ibid.

[v] Ibid., See also Horvath, Steven M. 1979, "The Social and Political Organization of the Genízaros of Plaza de Nuestra Señora de los Dolores de Belen, New Mexico, 1740-1812." PhD diss., Brown University.

The Historic Belén Bioarchaeology Project[i]

The Historic Belén Bioarchaeological Project is a collaborative effort that aims to contribute to a better understanding of the history of the people who founded, lived, and died in Belén, New Mexico in the 18th and 19th centuries. This work is centered on archaeological excavation at the Plaza Vieja (also known as "Old Town") - a location recognized by many descendant community members to be the site of the original mission church of Nuestra Señora de Belén. The work conducted here aims to delineate the foundations of the church, as well as to recover, examine, and relocate any burials uncovered to the current Our Lady of Belén Catholic Cemetery at the end of the recovery period (2024).[ii]

Emergence of the Mission Pueblo de Belén

During the 1720s-1730s, formerly enslaved Native Americans (categorized as Genízaros) began settling in Rio Abajo villages including Albuquerque, Bernalillo/Sandía Pueblo area, and the Isleta Pueblo/Belén area. By 1740 a group of Genízaros were established in Belén. Genízaro is a Spanish colonial term used for Native Americans from various tribes (mostly Plains or non-Pueblo) who were captured and brought into Spanish households as servants and assimilated into the colonial Spanish social and religious systems. Captivity and servitude not only denied them their freedom, but it also resulted in the suppression of their cultures, languages, and identity. Once freed to certain extents and labeled Genízaro, they often were grouped together and lived at the margins of the Spanish and Pueblo Indian societies.[iii]

Around 1740 Spanish/Mestizo people, some with their Indian servants, migrated from northern New Mexico to Belén and received the Spanish land grant of Nuestra Señora de Belén. Initially this was contested by the already established Genízaro community, but by 1750 the two communities while living separately were building what became initially the Mission Pueblo de Belén. The 1750 census of Belén enumerated these two communities totaling 162 persons - 53% Native American (Genízaro villagers and Indian servants of the Spanish households) and 47% Spanish and Mestizo land grant newcomers. By the early 1800s, the two communities were well into merging and forming a new Mestizo community at Belén and surrounding plazas.[iv] This population represents the original community, that many individuals living in Belén today and elsewhere are descendant from.

Nuestra Señora de Belén Catholic Church, Cemetery and Burials

The Belén community began laying the rock foundations of Belén's first church and convento in 1791 and the rock/adobe structure was fully erected and in use by 1793.[v] The extant Belén church burial register recorded those buried in the church grounds and cemetery up to 1860 when a new church was constructed at the location of the present modern Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church. It is anticipated that this excavation project, at its completion along with subsequent analysis of the burials and material culture, will contribute tremendously toward a local and regional understanding of Spanish colonial and local populations and their early 19th century history. Additionally, this project along with continued archival research will provide a deeper understanding of the daily lives, resiliency, and adaptability of Genízaros and other Native Americans that were continuously brought into Belén as servants, and as land grant recipients.

Descendant Community Engagement

An important element of *The Historic Belén Bioarchaeological Project* is that we are working directly with individuals who are descendants of those buried in the mission cemetery. By actively engaging and collaborating with the descendant community in every step of our research process, we expressly integrate their voices, questions, and positions as stakeholders in how their ancestors' stories are told and how the burials are handled. Our project offers a model for how ethical and impactful community-engaged bioarchaeological research can be done, and how we, as scientists, can engage with the communities in which our work takes place to decolonize narratives about the past.

NMAC doesn't provide any guidance on how this is determined. Under NAGPRA, evidence of a kin or cultural affiliation between a present-day individual, Indian tribe, or Native Hawaiian organization and human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony must be established by geographical, kinship, biological, archeological, anthropological, linguistic, folklore, oral tradition, historical, or other relevant information or expert opinion (43 CFR 10.14(e). Under NAGPRA, it is the museum (SHPO) or Federal agency responsible for determining cultural affiliation. However, under 4.10.11 NMAC, it isn't clear who makes the determination of cultural affiliation so in consultations with SHPO it is presumed that the SHPO or the entity who maintains control or custody of the remains and funerary objects will make this determination.

For this project, we have the First Church of Belén's burial records for all individuals interred in this cemetery. In keeping with the Church requirements for interment in the affiliated burial ground, all individuals were baptized into the Catholic faith. However, we do not know where specific individuals were buried, so direct affiliations/relationships will not be able to be established without analyses associated with DNA retrieval.

Repatriation: The third central goal of NAGPRA, is repatriation and reburial of affiliated human remains. Further, deposition is also a key element of the New Mexico Cultural Properties Act. At the end of the project, all ancesteral remains and any associated grave goods will be reinterred in the cemetery on the grounds of Our Lady of Belén Catholic Church. These arrangements have already been made with the Arch Dioceses of New Mexico.

Summary

The Historic Belén Bioarchaeology Project is first and foremost a conservation effort. Our aims are to delineate the original mission church foundation and to exhume the individuals buried in and around the mission church. Over the last 100 years, human remains have been regularly disturbed by rain, flooding, and construction on the property. Our project is a collaborative effort with the local descendant community who have invited us to recover, analyze and repatriate these burials to a protected location in the current church grounds where they can be visited by their descendants, many of whom still live in Belén today. Much like other historic projects (e.g., African Burial Ground, NYC, and the First African Baptist Church, Philadelphia), while NAGPRA does not apply, we are working with the original intent and the ethical treatment of human remains that NAGPRA legislation encourages.

For more information or questions please contact:

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[i] Sisneros, Samuel E., "The Colonial Mission Pueblo of Belén," chapter six in *Nación Genízara: Ethnogenesis, Place and Identity in New Mexico*, Ed. Moises Gonzales and Enrique Lamadrid, UNM Press, 2019

[ii] Repatriation and reburial at the end of the project, of all human remains and associated grave goods, will be conducted in the cemetery on the grounds of Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church. These arrangements have been made possible by the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.

[iii] See New Mexico Administrative Codes: 4.10.11.10, 4.10.11.11, 4.10.11.12, 4.10.11.13

The Historic Belén Bioarchaeological Project
Statement on the Ethical Treatment of Burials

The Historic Belén Bioarchaeological Project involves the excavation and analysis of burials located in and around the now collapsed First Nuestra Señora de Belén Mission Church located on private land in Belén, New Mexico. Belén was one of the first land grant towns, and was established by 1740 by a group of Genízaros. Genízaros were comprised of Native Americans from various tribes (mostly Plains or non-Pueblo), who were at the beginning of their assimilation into the Spanish social and religious systems as a result of being captured and brought into Spanish households as servants. Captivity and servitude not only denied them their freedom, but it also resulted in the suppression of their cultures, languages, and identity. Once freed to certain extents and labeled Genízaros, they often were grouped together and lived at the margins of the Spanish and Pueblo Indian societies.[i] The Spanish colonizers used land ownership as a way to coerce Genízaro families into living in these areas that were in the dangerous frontier zones, essentially protecting the inner Spanish colonies from raiding tribal groups. Today, Genízaros are rarely mentioned in history books, and it is only recently that historians and anthropologists have begun exploring the experiences, resiliency, and community of the people who lived on the fringes of colonial control.

This project is among the first to conduct a direct analysis of health and trauma from a historic colonial cemetery population in New Mexico that is comprised primarily of Genízaro individuals. What we learn through this work will add a nuanced dimension to Genízaro history. At this time, there are very few archival sources on patterns of morbidity and mortality within Genízaro communities. Once the excavations and analyses are complete, all ancestral remains will be relocated to the current Our Lady of Belén Catholic Cemetery in 2024.[ii] It is hoped that the land where the original mission existed will be turned into a memorial/heritage park to commemorate the lives of Belén's Genízaro ancestors.

Working with Ancestorial Remains

Many people may be familiar with *The Native American Graves Protection Repatriation Act* (NAGPRA) which applies to new excavations and inadvertent discoveries of burials on federal or tribal land (Title 43, Part 10, Subpart B) and to collections held by state or federal institutions receiving federal funds. Within this law is also the responsibility to determine cultural affiliation, and to repatriate remains when requested by the descendant community. While this project does not fall under NAGPRA jurisdiction, our team feels strongly that we address the three key tenets of NAGPRA (excavations, affiliations, and repatriation) in relation to the work at *The Historic Belén Bioarchaeology Project:*

Excavations: *The Historic Belén Bioarchaeology Project* is a project conducted on private property, not federal or tribal land, and as such the legal parameters of NAGPRA do not apply. Instead, our excavations are required to follow New Mexico State law, specifically: *The Cultural Properties Act* (Section 18-6-11.2), and the implementing rule 4.10.11.10/11/12/13 New Mexico Administrative Code[iii] for the excavation of unmarked human remains. In summary, under NM state statute and rule, the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) becomes responsible for, and has control over, unmarked human remains after excavation and during examination, as the remains must stay within the state of New Mexico as a condition of the unmarked burial excavation permit. This makes the SHPO the custodian of all the remains excavated. For this project this means that every year of excavations, ancestral remains and associated grave goods will be curated with the SHPO, until the end of the project.

Affiliations: Under NAGPRA, cultural affiliation means that there is a relationship of shared group identity which can be reasonably traced historically or prehistorically between members of a present-day Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization, or an identifiable earlier group (43 CFR 10.2(e)). The SHPO takes into consideration the recommendations for disposition of the remains from "living persons who may be related to the human burial" (4.10.11.7.J). A "living person" means the designated spokesperson of any tribal group or clan or any persons with demonstrable consanguinity, affinity, or direct historical association with the burial in question. But 4.10.11

THE HISTORIC BELÉN BIOARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT [1]

RECOVERING THE EARLY HISTORY OF BELÉN THROUGH THE RECLAMATION OF THE ORIGINAL MISSION CHURCH SITE AND MEMORIALIZING THE FOUNDING COMMUNITY

The Historic Belén Bioarchaeological Project

The Historic Belén Bioarchaeological Project has been a collaborative effort aimed at contributing to a better understanding of the history of the people who founded, lived, and died in Belén, New Mexico in the 18th and 19th centuries. The work conducted centered on archaeological excavation at the Plaza Vieja (also known as "Old Town"), a location recognized by many descendants of the founding community to be the site of the original mission church of *Nuestra Señora de Belén*.

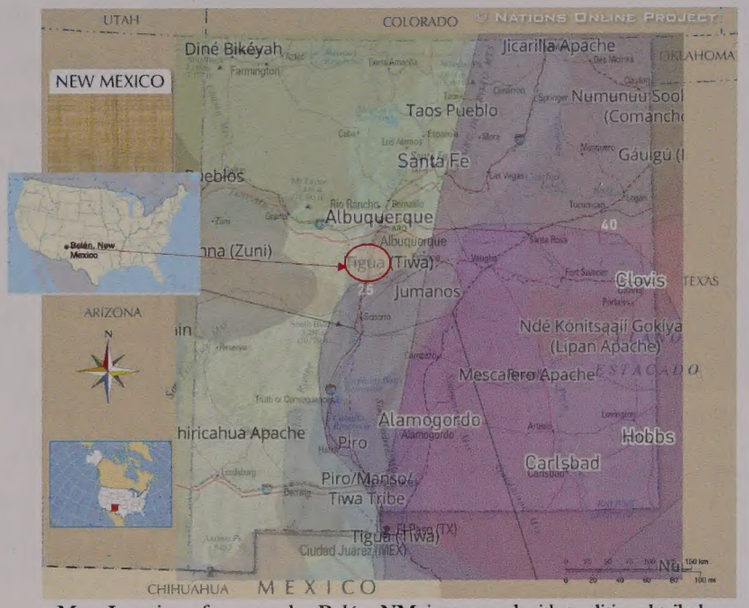
Archaeological excavations were aimed at uncovering and delineating the foundations of the original mission church. Bioarchaeological work aimed at the recovery and examination of any ancestral burials uncovered during excavations. Upon completion of the project's recovery period, all ancestral remains are to be laid to rest in the cemetery at Our Lady of Belén Catholic Church, Belén, NM. [Reburial date 02/21/2025.]

This project was initiated by descendant community members, whose families have stewarded the memory of the original mission church site for over a hundred years.

The recovery of history is a shared journey. This project would not have been possible without the knowledge and family histories of the descendants, the expertise of archaeologists and bioarchaeologists, and the efforts of genealogists, historians, geneticists, librarians, and other community members and interested people. The information that this project uncovered adds to this knowledge, supports what is known, and contributes to the larger story of the history of the people of Belén, New Mexico.

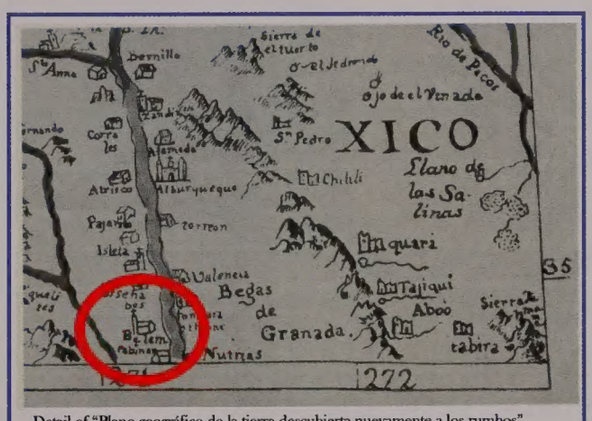
A Brief History of Belén, New Mexico

Belén, New Mexico is situated within the lands traditionally used and traversed by the Tiwa, Tampiro, and Piro peoples, along with other tribes, such as the Apache, Comanche, and Navajo people, who throughout the centuries were born, lived, hunted, traded, and engaged in love and war in this region.



Map: Location of present day Belén, NM, juxtaposed with traditional tribal homelands (traditional tribal homelands map https://native-land.ca/).

In the 1500s this land was stolen and colonized by the Spanish, who settled, leveraged, sold, and granted the land to others. In 1741 Captain Diego de Torres and Antonio de Salazar, both indentured by the Spanish and identified as Genízaros, requested a land grant[2]. Although they were initially turned down and their request contested, they persevered. By 1750 the Mission Pueblo de Belén was established and recognized by the Spanish authorities. Belén represents one of the earliest land grants given by Spanish authorities, making it one of the earliest frontier land grant communities in New Mexico.



Detail of "Plano geográfico de la tierra descubierta nuevamente a los rumbos" (geographical map of the land newly discovered in the directions), don Bernardo Miera y Pacheco, Felipe el Real de Chihauhau, 1778.

By 1848, the United States entered New Mexico and with bloody military dominance, colonized and claimed the land in 1850 as a territory of the United States. After a number of failed petitions, in 1912 New Mexico became a state of the Union, and Belén a town in the United States.

Visioning the recovery of the original mission church: Remembering the founding families of Belén

This project would never have happened if it were not for the work and vision of Samuel Sisneros, a descendant and historian, who synthesized archival data, historical documents, oral histories, genealogies, and local family stories expanding knowledge about the earliest history of Belén. His research in historic documents and genealogy brings forward Belén's founding Genízaro community[4], who negotiated with the colonial Spanish authorities, to create and build the village of Belén. Prior to his seminal work, there was a marked absence of Belén's Native American and Genízaro origins, settlement history, and recognition of the founding colonial church and Plaza in the city's official historic narratives and visual representations of civic identity.

Samuel Sisneros, site historian & consultant, 2023.

Thanks to the work conducted by Samuel Sisneros, here are some of the key things we know about the original mission church of Belén:

- **From 1800-1861 the church recorded 2325 deaths and subsequent burials in and around the original mission church.**
- **For all people buried in and around the church, their name, age, and parents' names, if someone was married – their spouses name, and sometimes the cause of death was recorded.**
- **While the church did not record where a person was laid to rest, records do distinguish those buried in the church floor. There were at least 265 people buried inside the church under the floor.**
- **More than half, 57% of burials, are children under the age of 12.**
- **The records reveal epidemics of smallpox, diphtheria, measles, viral influenza, and pertussis.**
- **The records reveal that there were a number of violent or traumatic deaths in the community.**

Historic Belen Bioarchaeology Project Outcomes

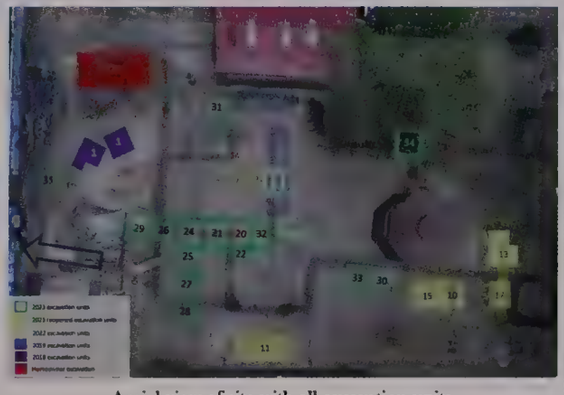
Archaeological and bioarchaeological work was conducted to confirm the location of the original mission church. This work was informed by Samuel Sisneros's research, the memories and stories of the O'Neal and Torres family, and the memories of many other descendants who shared their family stories. The archaeological work conducted is meant to honor this history, and the bioarchaeological work is meant to honor the ancestors and their descendants. Most importantly, this collaborative effort serves to expand the history of Belén, connecting the people who live here now to those who lived here in the past.

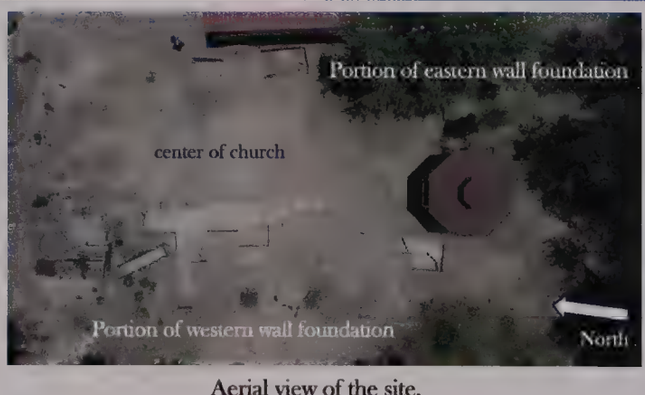
Archaeological Findings

Archaeological excavations, undertaken between 2018 and 2022, resulted in the opening of 32 excavation units. These units were concentrated on the property where family history indicated the location of the original mission church was located. All elements of the excavations followed standard archaeological protocols and were in compliance with New Mexico State law (*see endnote* #1).

Western portion of foundation wall looking north.

Archaeological excavations were successful in locating the original mission church of Belén. Through this work the delineate remnants of the east and west sides of the church wall foundations were delineated, and the approximate location of the center of the church was established.


Aerial view of site with all excavation units.



Aerial view of the site.

Bioarchaeological Findings

During excavations burials were encountered. Burials were expected as over the last 160 years stories from the local community have reported finding burials eroding out of the soil, or being accidentally dug up during the construction of houses and garages. In addition, newspaper articles in the mid-1900s reported on burials uncovered when the road was constructed and when some utilities were brought into the area. Further, it is well documented, at other New Mexican mission church sites dating to the 16th through the 19th centuries, that people were often buried under church floors in addition to associated cemeteries.

With the finding of burials bioarchaeological work conducted to address additional questions about the founding members of this community. For example: What was life like in early Belén? How did one of the earliest land-grant communities go missing from the history books and maps of the region? What can the ancestors tell their descendants about who they are today?

What was found is consistent with archival information and confirms much of what is known about life on the frontiers in the 18th and 19th centuries in this region of the continent: life was hard and yet people thrived. But, there were also epidemics, accidents, acts of violence, and struggles with nutrition that often resulted in untimely deaths for the people of Belén. Despite these struggles, many people persisted and lived to old age.

Here are a few of the things the archaeology and bioarchaeology uncovered:

- **Excavations uncovered 92+ individuals. Most of whom were buried in the center of the original mission church.**
- **More than half of individuals recovered were under the age of 12; which reflects the impact of epidemics and other chronic or traumatic experiences that adversely impacted the young.**
- **People were buried with nothing; no personal items were uncovered in excavations.**
- **Some people from Belén were buried in coffins. Coffin burials are virtually undocumented in what is now the American Southwest prior to 1870.**

Bioarchaeologists make sense of what they find by considering the community and their social systems within the historical contexts of the people being recovered. Combining social information with understandings of health and wellness through skeletal analysis offers a deeper understanding about the life history of an individual. Bioarchaeological analysis reveals long term-chronic physical experiences (physical work, traumas) and chronic health issues for each individual alongside what might have been happening in their social community, and within the literal environment that they lived, died, and were buried; we call this a biohistory.

From the archives and historical records (e.g., church death records), it is clear that the summer of 1816 was particularly devastating for the community of Belén, and many children died from epidemics. Excavations recovered the burials of three (3) children, who had been laid to rest together, at the same time, in an area at the very front of the church. History tells us that in many mission churches there was an area at the entrance of the church often reserved for child burials (this area is known as the place for the *Los Angelitos* – "*Little Angels*"). The placement of these three children in the cemetery, assessment of their ages, and understanding of their most likely rapid and simultaneous burials, combined with the burial records from the church, strongly suggests that these children died from an epidemic and were buried together. Their story reminds us about the struggles people faced during colonization, the impact of communicable diseases, and what might mean to live through epidemics, and to have to bury multiple children, who today might otherwise have survived.

Related projects

Community Engaged Genomics to Help Recover Genízaro History at Belén

Collecting a DNA sample from a living person and then sequencing their genome in the lab allows researchers a potential way to connect descendant families to their

Descendants visit Dr. Rick W.A. Smith at the Critical Molecular Anthropology Lab (CMAL), at George Mason University in Virginia. They collected their own DNA and learned about the work being undertaken with the Belén ancestors.

ancestors, building a bridge from the past to the present and bringing forward a history that has otherwise been erased by socio-political and colonial-historical forces. Genetic methods are also an important supplement to historical, archaeological, and archival records at Belén – allowing the potential to reconstruct familial ties between the ancestors recovered and living descendants.

Dr. Rick W. A. Smith, George Mason University, Indigenous STS Lab, and Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta, collected samples from the ancestors uncovered during excavations. He also collected DNA samples from members of the descendant community. Family members were invited to his lab to run their own DNA and to learn about the work being undertaken with the Belén ancestors. This work is still on-going.

New Mexican Genealogy Society: Genetic Genealogy and Family Lineages of New Mexican Origins

The NMGS Genetic Genealogy Project

This NMGS program helps participants validate their New Mexican genealogies. Participants are encouraged to share their Y-DNA and their mtDNA tests results with the project for analysis.

The project allows members to compare New Mexico data sets and contact matches to determine what they might have in common in terms of ancestors.

Contact NMGS DNA Administrator Miguel Tórrez at nmgsdna@gmail.com.

Concluding Reflections

What has been learned about Belén and its community, both past and present, is a testimony to the perseverance and persistence of ancestors and their descendants. Today there is a strong and vibrant, albeit small, community of direct descendants that still live in Belén. But there are also many people whose roots can be traced to the founding families of Belén living all over the United States. This work is meant to support their stories and add to the rich history of Belén.

We hope that the archaeological and bioarchaeological research we conducted, which has confirmed the site of the original mission church, inspires others to continue to write about and bring forward the history of Belén; one of the oldest original land grant communities in what is now New Mexico.

We also want to thank the community for inviting us to be part of the recovery of the history of Belén. As a result we have learned so much about Belén and its community. What we take away from our work and experiences is that Belén is a place of deep history, memory, resilience and tenacity, and community. There is an extensive history held by the families, whose members were born and raised, lived and worked, loved and thrived, and who died in the early days of Belén. We hope our work serves to honor them and support the memories of the paths they walked, and enrich the connections to their descendants living today.

The Historic Belén Bioarchaeology Project, was overseen by Dr. Pamela K. Stone, Dr. Debra Martin, and Dr. Claira Ralston. This booklet was written by Dr. Pamela K. Stone in collaboration with Dr. Debra Martin and Dr. Claira Ralston. ©2025.

Acknowledgements

We want to thank all our field crews, and all the students and volunteers who assisted with excavations, as well as many of our colleagues who have worked with us and offered advice and support across all aspects of this project. We also want to acknowledge and offer a heartfelt thank you to the O'Neal and Torres families who have stewarded the land and the memories for over a century and half, who nourished our bodies and minds, shared their family stories, and who treated us like members of their family throughout this entire project.

Further we thank the greater community of Belén, New Mexico, and the State of New Mexico, for their support of this project.

Funding & Support

This project is supported by ***The National Science Foundation under Grant No. 2051184.*** *Additional funding for this project has been awarded by: The Carryl B. Martin Research Award through the Arizona Archaeological and Historical Society, the PaleoWest Foundation, the American Association of University Women, the Arizona Archaeological and Historical Society Travel Grant, the Friends of World Anthropology Scholarship through the UNLV Anthropology Department, and the UNLV GPSA Summer Sponsorship Fund.*

ENDNOTES

1. *The Historic Belén Bioarchaeology Project* is a project conducted on private property, not federal or tribal land. All elements of these excavations followed New Mexico State law, *The Cultural Properties Act* (Section 18-6-11.2), implementing rule 4.10.11.10/11/12/13. New Mexico Administrative Code for the excavation of unmarked human remains. Under NM state statute and rule, the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) under the following unmarked burial excavation permit numbers (reports filed with the State of NM): 2018 BE-063; 2019 BE-071; 2020 BE-080; 2021 BE-091; 2022 BE-096; 2023 BE-107). Each year of excavations the human remains and associated grave goods were curated with the SHPO, until the end of the project. Repatriation and reburial of all human remains and associated grave goods, to the cemetery of Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church was made possible by the Archdiocese of Santa Fe. Reburial February 21, 2025.

2. Sisneros, Samuel E. 2016. "Belén's Plaza Vieja and Colonial Church Site: Memory, Continuity and Recovery." University of New Mexico. https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/ulls_fsp/137/.

   Sisneros, S.E. (2019a). The colonial Genízaro mission pueblo of Belén. In M. Gonzales and E.R. Lamadrid (Eds.) *Nacion Genizara: Ethnogenesis, Place, and Identity in New Mexico* (pp. 118-164). Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.

3. Baca, Oswald G., Paul G. Baca, and Mary Ann Baca. n.d. "Hispanic Genealogical Research Center of New Mexico, & Catholic Church. Archdiocese of Santa Fe." In *Burial Records from the Roman Catholic Parish of Nuestra Señora de Belén, Belén, New Mexico, 1793-1900*. Albuquerque: Hispanic Genealogical Research Center of New Mexico;

   Sisneros, Samuel E. 2019. "Belén Plaza Vieja and Colonial Church Preservation and Interpretive Plan." University of New Mexico. https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/ulls_fsp/146/.

4. Sisneros, Samuel E. 2016. "Belén's Plaza Vieja and Colonial Church Site: Memory, Continuity and Recovery." University of New Mexico. https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/ulls_fsp/137/.

   Sisneros, S.E. (2019a). The colonial Genízaro mission pueblo of Belén. In M. Gonzales and E.R. Lamadrid (Eds.) *Nacion Genizara: Ethnogenesis, Place, and Identity in New Mexico* (pp. 118-164). Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.

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224th Our Lady of Belen 2017 Fiestas

His Mercy Endures Forever

Nuestra Señora de Belén Archaeological Project

Dr. Ventura R. Pérez, Bioarchaeologist from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, will be discussing the upcoming excavations of Belén's first Catholic Church on **Sunday, August 20, 2017 at 5:00pm** at Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church. Dr. Pérez is the Principal Investigator for the project, which includes researchers from the University of Nevada Las Vegas, Hampshire College, the University of California Berkeley, and the University of New Mexico. The Nuestra Señora de Belén Archeological Project will include the archaeological excavation and delineation of the church foundations and the recovery, analysis, and respectful reinternment of the human remains within the site. The fundamental goal of this work is the recovery of the history of Belén's colonial church and plaza complex and the community that utilized it. Archival documents provided by the project's historian, Samuel Sisneros, have provided valuable insight into the size and layout of the original church and plaza complex, which will be useful in informing the progress of excavations. Dr. Pérez will be discussing the project and answering questions regarding this important piece of Belén's early history. Dr. Pérez can be reached at vrperez@anthro.umass.edu.

The First Nuestra Señora de Belén Church

Samuel Sisneros, August 2017

Belén's first Catholic Church, Nuestra Señora de Belén (Our Lady of Belen) has a unique history that has yet to be fully discovered and recovered. The area known today as Belén was traversed by the indigenous Tiwa and Piro Pueblo peoples during the 1600s. By the 1730s, Native Americans known as Genízaros (freed captives/servants from various tribes) started to settle in the Belén area. In 1740, a second group of migrants from northern New Mexico came to Belén and settled at or adjacent to the Genízaro settlement. This group consisted of Spanish, Mestizo (mixed Spanish and Indian), and their Indian servants. The land grant they received, together with the Genízaro village, became the mission pueblo of Nuestra Señora de Belén. The mixture of these early inhabitants became the core ancestors of many modern native families in Belén and in neighboring communities.

Belen's first priest, Fray Cayetano Bernal, administered to the Belén faithful initially from San Agustín de Isleta church. But soon he acquired a license to start a mission parish and construct a church in Belén. By 1791, local residents began to lay the rock foundation to the church and its attached *convento* or convent. In the colonial period, a *convento* was an inter-joining set of rooms attached to the church. These rooms were for the priest's living quarters, office, kitchen, workers, and guest's lodging, storage, etc. By 1793, the Nuestra Señora de Belén large adobe colonial mission church and *convento* officially became a parish with the dedication of its sacramental register books which documented many baptisms, marriages, and burials of residents from Belén, Jarales, Sabinal, and other locations or *plazas* as they were called.

Noted in the early 1800s as being one the most beautiful and productive mission churches and *conventos* in New Mexico, Belén's first church unfortunately fell victim to a natural catastrophe. In 1855, it was flooded and the church walls collapsed. After much dispute whether to rebuild at the same spot or at a new location, it was decided by the new American Catholic Bishop of New Mexico, Juan Bautista Lamy, to build a new church elsewhere. The new (second) church was built at the location where the modern Our Lady of Belen church is today (since then rebuilt a third time). Church vessels, adornments, or anything of importance or monetary value from the old colonial church would have been transferred to the new church. Meanwhile, the old fallen mission church and *convento* with its cemetery laid in ruins for several decades and as a result of continuous private residency by the extended family along with modern urbanization, the site's surface historical ruins have been completely removed or disintegrated. The location where Belén's old church is believed to be is in a residential area known today as Plaza Vieja.

(Summary from "Belén's Plaza Vieja and Colonial Church Site: Memory, Continuity and Recovery," Samuel Sisneros, UNM, 2016.) For more information about the history and preservation of Belén's colonial church and Plaza Vieja, contact Samuel Sisneros at ssisne01@unm.edu)

Francisco Sisneros

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VALENCIA COUNTY
News-Bulletin

WEEK OF AUGUST 24, 2017

SERVING VALENCIA COUNTY SINCE XXXX

Archeologists to excavate Nuestra Señora de Belen site

By Julia M. Dendinger
News-Bulletin Assistant Editor

BELEN

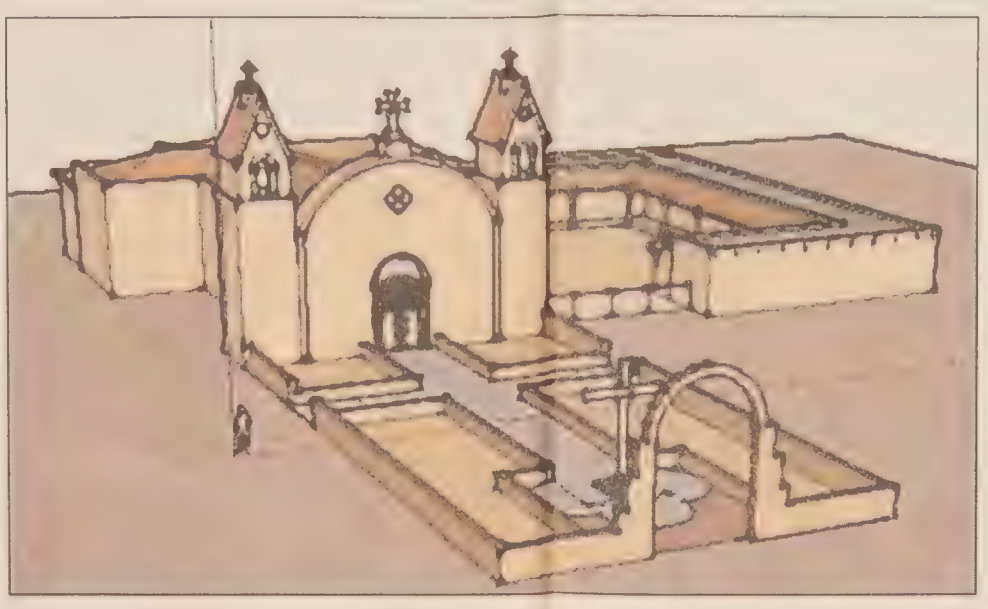
The foundation is all that remains and it is enough for faith to stand upon.

When the walls of Nuestra Señora de Belén fell more than 160 years ago, parishioners were not discouraged. They picked up and moved to higher ground, building and building again Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church.

Many generations of Belenites are familiar with the church on 10th and Church streets and know there was one that came before.

Now, thanks to the efforts of a local historian and cooperation of the archdiocese, state and local officials, the foundation of the old OLB church will be excavated and documented in a years-long project the lead investigator calls unique and special.

"I am beating colleagues off with a stick who want to be involved with this project," said Dr. Ventura Perez, associate professor of biological archaeology University of Massachusetts Amherst.



Courtesy of Jim Sloan

Belen history buff Jim Sloan created a rendering of Nuestra Señora de Belén (Our Lady of Belen) church based on the old church's blueprints and historical descriptions.

"This is a very rare project. The community, church and state leaders are all behind this. You should be very excited and proud of your community."

Perez was in Belen on Sunday, the last day of the annual OLB Fiestas, to introduce himself to parishioners and the community.

"I am a guest in your community. We are not here to excavate, take data and leave," he said. "Transparency is important. Our work doesn't stay in the bubble of academia. Yes, publish or perish is real, but it doesn't mean the public is left out."

The visit by Perez is just the beginning of the project, with actual field work at the old church site beginning next July. He anticipates the project will last at least three years, possibly as long as five.

Perez, who has worked in the field for more than 20 years, will work with a number of experts during the excavation and documentation of the old church site, including Dr. Debra Martin, University of Nevada Las Vegas; Dr. Paula Stone, Hampshire College; Dr. Kojin Suetseri, University of California Berkeley, and Samuel Sisneros, Belen historian and archivist for University of New Mexico's Center for Southwest Research and Special Collections.

"Samuel has done the majority of the work on the site. His research has been invaluable," Perez said. "I cannot express

See ***Excavate***, Page 5A

Belen on NMDOT's high-risk list

By Clara Garcia
News-Bulletin Editor

BELEN

The city of Belen has been placed on high-risk status by the New Mexico Department of Transportation, which has resulted in the denial of federal road funds for at least one project.

Belen Mayor Jerah Cordova said city officials were unaware they are considered "high risk" until they were recently notified the city had been denied a federal grant to pave a portion of Aragon Road, from the Highline Canal to Interstate 25.

The mayor said former city manager Jay Ruybalid had received notice in December 2015 but Cordova doesn't recall ever being told about it.

"As far as I can recall, I never received notification," Cordova said. "We asked that they provide documents to show their process and procedure for putting entities on a probationary list. We've never received that."

According to the letter to Ruybalid, dated Dec. 14, 2015, from Ken Murphy, the NMDOT District Three engineer, the city violated federal regulations by removing the roundabout on Christopher Road in the summer of 2015.

The city used $400,000 in federal funds and $115,000 in legislative capital outlay funds to construct a phase of the Christopher Road project, which included the roundabout.

The roundabout was constructed in 2013, but city officials soon realized that it needed to be removed because larger vehicles couldn't easily maneuver around it, causing damage to the structure.

The letter goes on to state "the city will be placed on NMDOT's high-risk list and will be under increased oversight for State and

See ***List***, Page 2A

OUR LADY OF BELEN FIESTAS

Julia M. Dendinger
News-Bulletin photo

Makayla Cordova, right, was crowned the 2017 Our Lady of Belen Fiestas Queen. She was joined by Fiestas Junior Princess Abigail Montoya, 7, left, in the parade Saturday morning.

Rebecca Martinez
News-Bulletin photo

It's all fun and rides at Our Lady of Belen Fiestas, below, this past weekend. Hundreds showed up for fiesta burgers, cotton candy and live music.

Farmer says deputy took bales of hay

By Julia M. Dendinger
News-Bulletin Assistant Editor

BELEN

A Belen farmer has accused a Valencia County sheriff's deputy of stealing more than $1,000 in alfalfa hay bales from his barn.

Matt Chavez, of Belen, said earlier this year he kept missing alfalfa from his barn. Since it wasn't on the same property as his home, Chavez set up motion activated cameras that would begin taking still images if someone entered the building.

"I pulled the memory card out of the camera to see what was there and I saw (Valencia County Sheriff's Office) Deputy Fred Torres," Chavez said.

The farmer said he could identify Torres — both in and out of uniform in the pictures — because the two had done business in the past. He printed the photos and took them to the Valencia County Sheriff's Office to file a complaint in mid May.

Chavez said he spoke to two VCSO detectives at that time, one of whom he says advised him not to accept an offered payment from Torres because the deputy was already under internal investigation.

"When I talked to the second detective, he said based on the time stamp on the pictures, Mr. Torres was on the clock the day the pictures were taken," Chavez said.

Sheriff Louis Burkhard said Chavez has made allegations that Torres stole 150 bales of hay.

"If there was evidence of criminal activity by one of my employees, they would be gone in a New York second," Burkhard said during an interview last week. "We did an internal investigation (in June) and determined we can't say for sure he stole the hay. He says he took 20 bales and owes Mr. Chavez

See ***Hay***, Page 3A

WEATHER 8661

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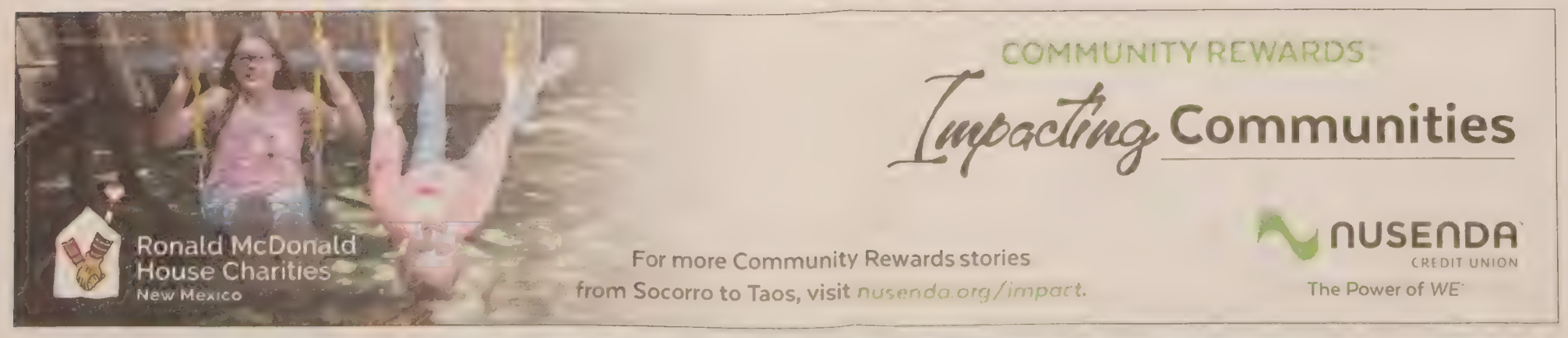

community DATABANK

on the agenda

(Editor's Note: The following agendas should be considered draft agendas until 72 hours prior to the meetings.)

Los Lunas Village Council

When: 6 p.m., Thursday, Aug. 24, in the council chambers

Agenda highlight

Consideration of a feasibility study for a business incubator in Valencia County

Also on the agenda

- Consideration of U.S. Department of Justice Edward Byrne Memorial JAG grant
- Consideration of interim budget adjustments
- Consideration of report assessing the costs incurred and associated with demolition and cleaning up activities at 248 Mission St.
- Consideration of appointment of library board members
- Consideration of support for Rio Metro Regional Transit grant application
- Consideration of contract for the recreation division
- Executive session to discuss hiring a police office, full-time recreation aide, full-time park tech and full-time solid waste commercial driver

Belen Planning and Zoning Commission

When: 6 p.m., Monday, Aug. 28, in the council chambers

Agenda highlight

Discussion of fencing and landscape ordinance

Also on the agenda

- Public comment
- Communication from the commission and staff

valencia county WEATHER

Local 5-Day Forecast

Thursday 8/24	Friday 8/25	Saturday 8/26	Sunday 8/27	Monday 8/28
86/61	89/62	90/62	90/62	98/62
A 30 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms, mainly after noon. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 86.	A 20 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms after noon. Mostly sunny, with a high near 89.	A 20 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms. Mostly sunny, with a high near 90.	A 20 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms. Mostly sunny, with a high near 90.	Mostly sunny, with a high near 90. At night, a 30 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms.

Courtesy of the National Weather Service @ **weather.gov**

Precipitation As of Wednesday, Aug. 23

		Avg.			Avg.
Wednesday (Aug. 16)	.00	.02	Monday (Aug. 21)	.00	.02
Thursday (Aug. 17)	.00	.02	Tuesday (Aug. 22)	.00	.02
Friday (Aug. 18)	.00	.02			
Saturday (Aug. 19)	.00	.02	Month	1.32	1.28
Sunday (Aug. 20)	.60	.02	Year to date	4.99	5.28

List: Mayor wants answers

from **PAGE 1A**

federally funded projects. The goal is to reduce waste and misuse of the tax dollars that are allocated for transportation needs."

"Belen would be required to repay the NMDOT approximately $400,000 from the project," Emilee Cantrell, the NMDOT public information officer, said on Monday. "The NMDOT in an agreement with the Federal Highway Administration placed Belen on 'high risk' in lieu of the repayment of funds. This status indicates that NMDOT and FHWA inspectors will have oversight on future projects."

When asked by the *News-Bulletin* what the city can do to be removed from the high-risk list, Cantrell simply replied "Have good project oversight."

"The December 2015 letter doesn't impact our funding," Cordova said. "It calls for increased oversight. The city has successfully completed many transportation projects — and other major projects — since Christopher Road. If NMDOT can clearly outline for us how we demonstrate compliance, we would be happy to do it so we can move forward."

While Cantrell only mentioned the Christopher Road project as the reason for the high-risk status, Cordova said he has been told another project is involved in the state's decision.

The mayor said when the city was denied the funds for the Aragon project in April, the Mid Region Council of Governments told Belen officials that the denial was because of the roundabout issue and because of the demolition of a city-owned house on Aragon Road.

The home, along with two others, were given to the city by NMDOT when the Aragon railroad overpass, which was also a federally-funded project, was constructed about 10 years ago. Cordova said city and NMDOT officials at the time came to an agreement regarding those properties.

"Part of the project was a commitment by the city that three residential properties, which were given to the city, and the city was responsible for preservation of these houses," Cordova said. "Several properties were needed to complete the overpass, but there was excess property that remained."

The mayor said the state and federal governments didn't want the properties, so it was negotiated for the properties to be given to the city.

> *"The city has successfully completed many transportation project — and many other major projects — since Christopher Road."*
>
> **Jerah Cordova**
> Belen mayor

"There were real shoddy agreements related to these properties; they're not real formal but they say we'll do certain things to take care of these properties," the mayor said. "My understanding of the agreements is that we were required to preserve these properties and care for them."

Cordova said one of the houses, dubbed the Carter house, was in horrible shape and had been constantly vandalized. He said a former councilor had personally arranged for the structure to be demolished.

"Granted, we owned the property and if we wanted to tear it down, we probably could have; however, we didn't look at the documentation that it needed to be preserved per the agreement," he said. "It got knocked down, it's no longer there and the land is clean but the state wasn't happy about it."

The mayor said the city does not have the money to own and care for the two remaining properties, saying they can cut the weeds and make sure they stay boarded up and secure. He also maintains that his administration isn't going to invest money to bring them up to code and use them for any purpose.

"We have other focuses and more important projects," he said.

In the meantime, Cordova said he hasn't received approval from NMDOT to sell the properties, which he would like to do.

"I'd like to get a response from NMDOT about what we can do to get this corrected, to get us off this high-risk list, but we haven't heard anything from NMDOT," Cordova said.

news DIGEST

Heinrich visit

Senator Martin Heinrich will be at Carlos' Cantina & Grill in Belen at 11 a.m., Saturday, Aug. 26, immediately following the Valencia County Fair Parade for a public meet and greet. There will be free food and beverages.

Udall staff to be in Belen

A representative from the office of U.S. Senator Tom Udall will hold Udall Serving You Office Hours in Belen on Tuesday, Aug. 29, for Valencia county residents who need help with issues related to federal agencies.

Office hours will be held in Belen from 2-3 p.m. at the Belen City Hall. Residents of Belen and the surrounding communities are encouraged to stop by.

Some of the areas Udall can help you with include:

- Veterans: Veterans' benefits, eligibility determinations, VA home loans, and replacements of medals earned.
- Social Security: Social Security benefits and eligibility, missing checks.
- Immigration: Assistance with facilitating the naturalization application process, immigrant petitions for relatives and adjustment of status applications that are delayed or lost.
- Passports: Obtaining an emergency passport, help with a lost passport and overseas travel restrictions.

Court closure

The Belen Municipal Court will be closed for training on Thursday, Aug. 31. They will re-open on Tuesday, Sept. 5.

Volunteers to clean up NM 47

Volunteers with the local ScOutreach program will be holding a community clean up beginning at 8 a.m., Saturday, Aug. 26, on both sides of N.M. 47 between Mile Markers 19 and 20. Motorists are asked to drive carefully and be aware of the youth as they perform this important project. The program is sponsored by the Founders Group of Rio Communities.

Mansion Players to perform

The Mansion Players will perform "She is My Mother," a play about a family living with Alzheimer's disease and how its impacted their lives, at 6 p.m., Saturday, Aug. 26, at the Belen First Methodist Church in Rio Communities. The performance is free but donations will be welcome.

Self defense

Join the Valencia County Extension Association of New Mexico for a "Ladies Night Out."

It is time to start thinking about how to keep you and your family safe. Learn basic self-defense techniques and D.A.D Level 1 training taught by Gloria Marcott, of the Rio Rancho Police Department.

The free "Ladies Night Out" self-defense training will be held at Eagle Park Community Center in Belen at 6 p.m., Tuesday, Aug. 29. For more information on the "Ladies Night Out' self-defense training, call Anne-Marie Wilson at 565-3002.

BAL exhibit

The Belen Art League is honored and excited to announce a Special Art Exhibition of Artists from the Belen Area at the New University of New Mexico Innovation Academy, at the corner of Broadway and Central in Albuquerque. The exhibition will be up from August to January 2018.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony for this new UNM program is from 9 a.m. to noon, Friday, Aug. 25, which is open to public and tours will be given.

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THE HITMAN'S BODYGUARD - R - (1:55)* 4:35 7:15 (9:50)**
LOGAN LUCKY - PG13 - (1:50)* 4:25 7:10 (9:40)**
ANNABELLE: CREATION - R - (2:15)* 4:45 7:20 (9:55)**
THE NUT JOB 2 - PG - (2:00)* 4:30 7:00 (9:35)**
THE EMOJI MOVIE - PG - (2:05)* 4:35 7:05 (9:30)**
WAR FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES - PG13 - (2:20)* 6:50 (9:40)**
THEATRE WILL BE CLOSED THURSDAY 8/31 FOR PRIVATE EVENT
www.StarlightCinema8.com
Showtimes for Friday, August 25th - August 31st, 2017
We are discontinuing the Monday - Thursday 1:30 -2:00 shows
( )** Late Evening shows Fri. & Sat. only
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About Us

The *Valencia County News-Bulletin*, which was established in 1910, is a locally owned and operated community newspaper, dedicated to serving Valencia County through the highest journalistic and professional business standards. The *Valencia County News-Bulletin* is published weekly on Thursdays, including holidays — and online at news-bulletin.com. Our office hours are from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

The *Valencia County News-Bulletin* is a state- and national-award winning newspaper that prides itself in serving with skill and character, and to exercising First Amendment freedoms with vigor and responsibility. As a newspaper, we are politically independent and welcome community submissions from all points of view.

The *Valencia County News-Bulletin* is a member of the Greater Belen Chamber of Commerce, the Hispano Chamber of Valencia County, the Los Lunas Chamber of Commerce, the New Mexico Press Association, the New Mexico Foundation for Open Government and the National Newspaper Association.

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OBITUARIES

Jewel Craig-Helvie

1971-2017

Jewel Craig-Helvie, a resident of Albuquerque, formerly of Belen, passed away quietly in her sleep on Wednesday, Aug. 16, 2017.

Jewel was born at Presbyterian Hospital in Albuquerque. She attended school in Belen. She then went on to Highlands University and the University of New Mexico, where she earned an associate degree in elementary education. She loved working and tutoring children of all ages.

She was helping in the bookkeeping department at Craig Independent Tire Inc. in Belen.

She is preceded in death by her father, John L. Craig; her maternal grandparents, John L. and Carrie Sullivan; paternal grandparents, Jewell and Mary Craig.

She is survived by her husband, Terry Helvie, of the family home in Albuquerque; mother, Carolyn Craig, of Belen; father- and mother-in-law, Urban and Peggy Helvie; brothers, John R. Craig (J.R.) and wife, Kassandra, and Cory Dillman and fiancé, Michelle Carroll; nephews, Ian and Quincy Hrasky and William Terrel IV; niece, Ripley Hrasky; aunt, Bobbie Ann Salaz; cousins, Jose and Abraham Salaz; and many other cousins on the Craig side and nephews and nieces on the Helvie side of the family.

All services took place on Saturday, Aug. 19, at the First Baptist Church of Los Chavez. Interment followed at the Terrace Grove Cemetery.

Jewel was such a loving, kind and generous person, who will be greatly missed by the many people whose lives she touched.

Please sign Jewel's online tribute at romerofuneralhomenm.com. Romero Funeral Home, 609 N. Main St., Belen.

Onecima L. Duran

1919-2017

Onecima L. Duran was born on March 23, 1919, and passed away on July 5, 2017. She was a resident of Phoenix, Ariz.

She was the seventh born to Estevan and Aurelia (Marquez) Lopez in Pueblitos. Her family legacy dates to one of the first families of Albuquerque in 1598.

She married Frank D. Duran in St. Johns, Ariz., on Nov. 6, 1940; he died on Aug. 8, 2010.

During World War II, she moved to Los Angeles, Calif., with one of her sisters, and worked and supported the war effort as a "Rosie the Riveter" at Douglas Defense Plant until her husband's safe return from the Pacific Theater.

Upon retiring from work, she and Frank went fishing in the Phoenix, the White Mountains and St. Johns area and shared their catch of day with the neighbors and friends. She was a fan of baseball and other sporting events. And was a member of St. Catherine's Catholic Church in South Phoenix.

She is survived by three sons, Ben J. Duran (Charlotte), of Peshtigo, Wisc., Frank H. Duran (Judy) and Patrick D. Duran, both of Phoenix, Ariz.

Also surviving are sister, Emilia Baca, of Tomé; and a brother, Estanislado (Tane), of Pueblitos; grandchildren, Sarah Lottie-Marie Desheva (Veli), of Wisconsin Dells, Wisc.; Levi B. Duran (Aeschel), of El Paso, Texas (currently servicing in Iraq), Thomas Duran, of Phoenix, Theresa Scopa and James Scopa, both of Phoenix, Tinh, Tian Tam Phan, of Jacksonville, Ark., Frances (Alfonso) Olea, of Jacksonville, Fla., Michael Wilson, Lisa Wilson and Emily Rucker, of Phoenix; and great-grandchildren, Anthony, Chloe, Jaxson, Kate, Aydan, Nadya and Kristina.

Also surviving are sister-in-law, Dudy Duran, of Phoenix; and a brother-in-law, Ed Gallardo, of Phoenix; and many nieces, nephews and friends.

In addition to her parents and her husband, she was preceded in death by her two daughters, Lillian Grace Scopa and Darlene Antonia Duran; her six brothers, Benito, Filemon, Espiridion (Pete), Manuel, Eduardo (Lalo) and Eluetrio (Lute); and three sisters, Amalia, Adelina and Lucia.

A memorial service will take place at 5:30 p.m., Saturday, Aug. 26, at the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church at Tomé. Burial will take place at a later date at the Veterans National Cemetery in Phoenix, Ariz.

ECLIPSE VIEWING

Julia M. Dendinger-News-Bulletin photos

University of New Mexico-Valencia chemistry professors Tracy Terry, rear, and Jerry Godbout, front, set up a telescope in the campus courtyard Monday morning so eclipse viewers could get a close-up view.

The courtyard at the University of New Mexico-Valencia campus was crowded with eclipse watchers late Monday morning. Students Naomi Garica, left, and Rebecca Martinez, right, were among the 100-plus who turned out for the partial solar eclipse visible in New Mexico.

Eliseo Marquez

1972-2017

Eliseo Marquez, born on Sept. 6, 1972, in Belen, was called home on Friday, July 7, 2017, in Los Angeles, Calif., at the age of 44.

He attended school in Belen until he moved to Lovington, where he attended high school. Eliseo was a free spirit and loved to travel. He spent a lot of time at the beaches in California, as it was his favorite place to be.

He loved his family with all his heart and was always concerned about everyone's well being. His conversations always centered on knowing how his family was doing. He laughed a lot and wanted everyone to be happy. Every conversation always ended with "I love you" and "Take care of yourself."

Eliseo was a loving, kind and gentle soul, who will be greatly missed by his family and the many people whose lives he touched.

Eliseo is preceded in death by his grandparents, Domingo and Manuela Marquez and Enrique and Anita Mcafee Chavez; sister, Virginia Marquez; uncle, Raymond Chavez; aunts, Rosa Alderete and Maria Chavez Chapa; and nephew, Ronnie Marquez.

He is survived by his parents, Adan Marquez and Lucy Balderrama; siblings, Elida Perez, Joe Frank, Kathy Savilla and husband, Anthony, Adam Marquez, AJ Marquez, Priscilla Ration and husband, Mitchell, Anita Marquez and partner, Laura Nieto; 16 nephews and nieces; and 12 great nephews and nieces.

Services will be held on Thursday, Aug. 31, at Romero Funeral Home Chapel. Visitation will begin at 10 a.m. with a funeral service to be celebrated at 11 a.m. Interment will follow at Terrace Grove Cemetery.

Urn bearers will be Mitchell Ration and Anthony Savilla.

Please sign Eliseo's online tribute atromerofuneralhomenm.com. Romero Funeral Home, 609 N. Main St., Belen.

Melba Jean Mora

1940-2017

Melba Jean Mora, 77, a resident of Los Lunas, was called home on Wednesday, Aug. 16, 2017.

Melba was born and grew up in Cimarron, N.M., on Jan. 11, 1940, to Juan and Florintina Romero. She came from a large family. She loved canning, and was an amazing cook and baker. Melba loved to make people laugh, enjoyed telling stories about her life, and was so proud of her Native American heritage. She was an artist and won an award for her paintings.

Melba and Clarence, her husband of 61 years, were very adventurous and traveled to many places both at home and abroad. Melba's faith was everything to her. She was a lifetime Christian and member of San Clemente Catholic Church in Los Lunas. She was very involved in her church. She taught Catechism to adults, led marriage retreats, performed missionary work and guided her grandchildren in their faith as well. Melba's favorite Bible passage was Psalm 23 "Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Melba is preceded in death by her son, Marcos Juan Mora; grandson, Nicholas Jon Mora; parents, Juan and Florintina Romero; brothers, John Romero, Litra Romero and Clarence Romero; sisters, Annabelle Romero and Gloria Hargrave.

Melba is survived by her loving husband, Clarence Alfred Mora, of Los Lunas; sons, Clarence Andrew Mora and wife, Cheryl, and Antonio Emanuel Mora and wife, Mia; daughters, Paula Venegas and Naomi Krause; 13 grandchildren, Manuel, Andrea and Celina Mora, Catalina and Marisol Mora, Joshua, Bailey and Samuel Krause, Gabrielle, Christopher and Eric Venegas, Jeannie and Nicholas Mora; great-grandchildren, JodeeLee Rigdon and Joshua Mora; sisters, Eva Sanchez; sisters-in-law, Mary Romero, Mary Hernandez and husband, Louis, Esther Doñez and husband, Francisco and Dora Garcia; and many nephews, nieces and loving friends.

Services were held on Monday, Aug. 21, 2017, at San Clemente Catholic Church. Interment followed at Our Lady of Belen Memorial Gardens.

Pallbearers were Antonio Enrique, Francis Doñez, Chris Venegas, Eric Venegas, Joshua Krause, and Manual Mora.

Please sign Melba's online tribute at romerofuneralhomenm.com Romero Funeral Home, 609 N. Main St., Belen.

Dominic F. Moya

1995-2017

Dominic F. Moya, age 22, a resident of Los Lunas, went to be with the Lord on Saturday, Aug. 19, 2017.

Please contact the funeral home for service times.

Arrangements are being handled by the caring professionals at the Noblin Funeral Service Belen Chapel, 418 W. Reinken Ave., 864-4448, where an online guest register is available at noblinfuneralservice.com.

Ramona Padilla

1949-2017

Ramona Padilla, age 68, joined our heavenly father Tuesday, Aug. 15, 2017.

Ramona was born in Los Lunas and proud of it! Ramona was the eighth child of 10 born to Cliserio and Emilia (Tafoya) Padilla. She was born on Feb. 28, 1949.

Mona had started her family early in life. She had to drop out of high school. She prided herself by going back to high school in her early 20s and getting her high school diploma from Albuquerque High School. She later attended beauty school. She obtained her cosmetology license and became a cosmologist.

Mona had worn many hats in her life — she was a daughter, a sister, a mother, a wife, a friend, a confidant, a counselor, a cosmetologist, a waitress, a bartender, a school bus driver and, at home, she was a handy woman. Mona had also owned her own beauty shop in Los Lunas, where she and her cousin, Rosie, cut and styled many men and women's hair.

She enjoyed knitting, sewing, gardening and sharing God's good word with anyone who would listen. Mona had retired (medically) from the Los Lunas Schools as a school bus driver due to an accident while on duty. She would say "luckily I had no children on board."

On Aug. 15, Ms. Padilla joined her beloved son, Frank "Nino" Serna, and many other family members, including her parents, Cliserio and Emilia; brothers-in-law, Tommy, John and Avilio; sisters, Avierla "Lela" (Chavez) and Mela Blea; brothers, Cliserio (Jr.) and Trinidad (Trini); sister-in law, Sue; nephews, Tommy Bustamante and Marty Padilla; and Lil cousin, Gabriel Martinez.

Mona is survived by sister, Feliz Bustamante, of Gallup; sister, Julia St. John, of Livermore, Calif.; sister-in-law, Selena (Sally), sister, Cecelia Moralez and husband, Beora Heart, of Elk Grove, Calif.; brother, Pedro (Pete) and wife, Judith (Judi) Padilla, of Albuquerque; brother, Placido (Paul) and wife, Marlene Padilla, of Albuquerque; sister, Irene Padilla, of Albuquerque; and many nephews, nieces and cousins, who she loved dearly.

Mona's children include her daughter, Christina (Tina) and husband, Joseph (Cougar) Lucero, of Isleta, son, Vincent (Vince) and wife, Maricruz (Mari) Serna, of Los Lunas, son, Antonio Fernandez Jr., of Los Lunas.

Her grandchildren are Antoinette Lucero, of Los Ranchos de Albuquerque, Vincent Serna, of Albuquerque, Joseph and wife, Rachel Lucero, of Isleta, Maricruz Jovana (Serna) and husband, Eddie Brandenburg, of Los Lunas, Julian Serna, of Los Lunas, Christopher Fernandez and girlfriend, Rachelle Sanchez, of Los Lunas, Alexander Fernandez, of Los Lunas, Antonio Andres Fernandez, of Albuquerque; and great-grandchildren, (Antoinette) Kode and Katherine, (Joe) Carmen and (Maricruz Jovana) Aidan.

Mona's pride and joy are her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Later in life, she became a Raiders, Steelers and 49ers fan. When asked why so many teams, she would reply "They are my boy's teams!"

A rosary will be held at the San Antonio Church, 1551 Los Lentes Road in Los Lunas, at 7 p.m., Thursday, Aug. 24. Cremation has taken place. Visitation with family will be at 9:30 a.m. Services will be at 10 a.m. at Calvary New Harvest, 701 Main St. in Los Lunas.

A reception will immediately follow at Calvary New Harvest. The family would like to thank the staff of University of New Mexico Hospital for taking care of our mother. We would also like to thank the staff at Calvary New Harvest for opening their arms to our family in our time of need.

Sawyer Mae Avery Emond

June 9 - Aug. 11, 2017

Sawyer Mae Avery Emond, born June 9, 2017, was gathered into the arms of our Lord on Friday, Aug. 11, 2017.

Sawyer was the youngest daughter of Morgan and Naomi Emond, of Isleta. She was doted on by her three older siblings, Traven Todd, Rowan Elizabeth and Eva Don Emond.

She was a sweet-tempered, beautiful baby, who never failed to bring joy to her family. She loved to smile and jabber at puppies; she loved to grasp at her sisters' hair and hear her mama's voice.

She is preceded in death by her paternal grandfather, Todd Emond, of Isleta.

Sawyer is mourned by her loving parents and siblings, as well as paternal grandmother, Esther (Chiwiwi) Emond, of Isleta; maternal grandparents, Don Miller, of Los Lunas, and Kathy (Williams) Beck, of Los Chavez; as well as numerous great-grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins.

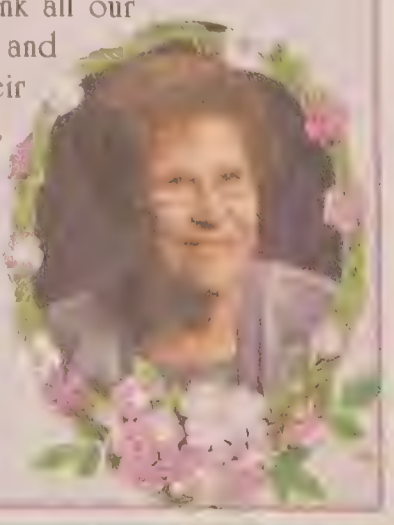
Sawyer, along with her family, attended Calvary Chapel Light of the World in Bosque Farms, and her family would like to thank the ministry there as well as Calvary Chapel New Harvest for all of their support in this time, as well as express gratitude for the outpouring of love from their family, friends and community.

Her family also requests that in lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Sawyer's name to the American SIDS Institute at sids.org.

The family of Margaret M. Lucero

would like to thank all our relatives, friends and neighbors for their support, prayers, food and Mass intentions during the loss of our mother.

With Sincere Gratitude
The Family of
Margaret Lucero



Excavate: Study at site will begin next year; burial remains to be reinterred

from PAGE 1A

how glad we are he came to us."

Before becoming a historian and archivist, Sisneros was a genealogist and traced one of his maternal lineages to Belen natives living at the Belen mission plaza in the 1790s.

Determined to find evidence, knowledge or documentation of the colonial village of Belen for a documentary project, Sisneros went to the Belen Harvey House Museum, where he overheard a local woman talking to her granddaughter about family history.

"I started a conversation and asked her if she knew where the older, historical part of Belen was. She smiled and said she lived there, and proceeded to show me a 1905 map exhibited in the museum," Sisneros said. "The map had a rectangle drawing with the words 'Old Town Church Ruins.'

"This set me on a six-year path, researching every primary document, secondary publication or oral history I could find on the early history of the Pueblo of Belen and Our Lady of Belen church."

Sisneros' resulting report, "Belen's Plaza Vieja and Colonial Church Site: Memory, Continuity and Recovery," can be found at the University of New Mexico Zimmerman Library, the Belen Public Library and at Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church.

"It is my hope that archeological excavation at the Belen site will 'ground truth,' what is known from documented history as presented in my research and through local oral tradition," he said.

Perez will be studying the skeletal remains of the people he expects to find at the church site and accompanying cemetery.

"Studying the skeletal remains tells us not just how people died but more importantly how they lived. What their nutrition was like as a child, the type of work they did," the professor said. "This is not some ghoulish desire to look at the dead. I want to understand cultures and how it impacts the life of a person. What we find are snapshots of what it means to be human throughout space and time."

Being allowed to excavate isn't a simple process, Perez said. To go forward with the project, he had to get permission from the landowner, inform the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office and apply for a burial permit for the project, inform the state medical examiners office and local law enforcement.

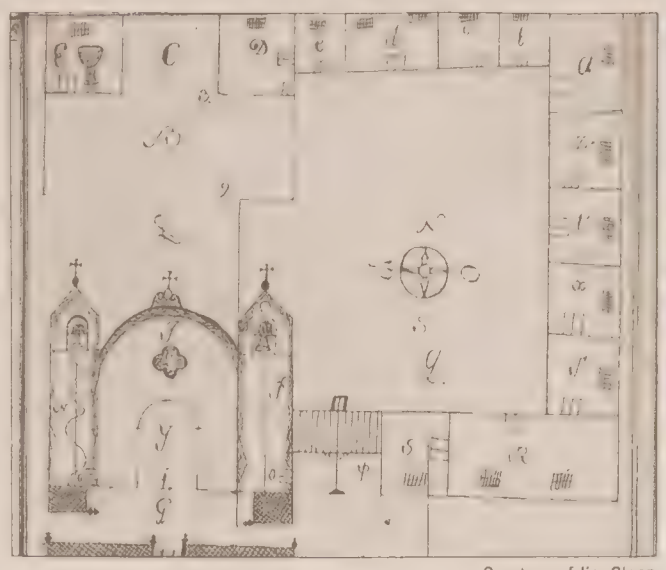
Any remains found will be safeguarded and curated until the excavation is done, then reinterred at the new church cemetery.

"My goal for any remains recovered is to bury them with all the due reverence they deserve," Perez said.

He has the original blueprints of the church and ground penetrating radar has been used to survey the site of the old church.

"What we do have, without a doubt, is the foundation of the church. It's a stone wall buried underground and the dirt floor, which is intact," Perez said.

The precise location of the old church isn't being disclosed at this time at the request of the landowner.



Courtesy of Jim Sloan

Nuestra Señora de Belén

Julia M. Dendinger | News-Bulletin photo

Dr. Ventura R. Perez, associate professor of biological archeology with the University of Massachusetts Amherst, speaks to a crowd gathered at Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church Sunday evening to explain an archeological dig he and associates will begin next year at the site of the old OLB church. Behind him are 3-D renderings made by historian Samuel Sisneros based on the original floor plans of the church.

"Once we start the excavation, you'll know where it is," he said.

In the meantime, Perez asked the public to refrain from locating the site and disturbing it.

"This site is on everybody's radar now. It is highly protected and regulated," Perez said. "There is nothing at the site worth breaking the law over — no gold, no silver, no artifacts.

"Archeology is a destructive science. We get one shot at it. If someone digs a hole and blasts through something, it destroys my analysis and your history. It is truly important that you, as a community, participate in this. It's your heritage and history."

OLB pastor Father Clement Niggel said he is excited about he project.

"This will help protect the community's heritage and honor its founders," Niggel said.

If anyone has information about the original church site or documents that might be helpful, contact Perez at vrperez@anthro.umass.edu or Sisneros at ssisne01@unm.edu.

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WEEK OF FEBRUARY 27, 2025

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Julia M. Dendinger | News-Bulletin photos

Patsy Torres reads from the Book of Isiah during a memorial Mass on Feb. 21. The Mass was held for the ancestral remains found during excavations at the old Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church on Wisconsin Street. The remains were reinterred at the new cemetery following the Mass.

Reinterred Remains

Reburial of ancestors from first church grounds to OLB Memorial Gardens

By Julia M. Dendinger
News-Bulletin Assistant Editor

Belen

History is often thought to be fixed, immutable, but there is a plethora of new information to be learned, stories to be added and facts uncovered.

What was once thought to be little more than stories has been turned into reality after seven years of archaeological exploration in the city of Belen.

Specifically, exploration and investigation in Plaza Vieja — Belen's Old Town and what was once the heart of the community. In 2017, a team of bio-archeologists came to the Hub City at the invitation of local historian and genealogist Samuel Sisneros.

His questions to these modern explorers? Had the first Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church really stood on a plot of land on what is now Wisconsin Street? Did the colonial village of Belen and the mission plaza he'd traced his lineage to really exist?

With permission from the private landowners and the state of New Mexico, and the blessing of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, in the summer of 2018, a group of bio-archeologists began working. The main goal of the project was to find the foundation of the original church, but they knew there would be human remains discovered.

After a memorial Mass at Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church last Friday, Feb. 21, boxes containing the ancestral remains excavated at the original mission church of Nuestra Senora de Belen on Wisconsin Street were reinterred at the current cemetery.

As the area developed through the centuries, local residents discovered human bones on a regular basis, which seemed to offer proof of the church and its cemetery being in the area. Before the project even moved a teaspoon of dirt, the researchers made a promise to the community — any remains found would be treated with respect and returned to holy ground when the project concluded.

After seven years of work — five in the field and two spent doing research due to COVD in 2020 and 2021 — the remains found at the site were reinterred at Our Lady of Belen Memorial Garden, the cemetery adjacent to Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church on 10th Street.

A memorial Mass conducted by Father Albert Mutebi Ssekabembe the morning of Feb. 21 was attended by three dozen people, some who are descendants of those found at the old church.

"This is about remembering," Ssekambembe said. "These ancestors are a part of our lives. Why do we remember?

"This may not be a fresh memory of how they made their tortillas but we remember their faith. Their memory is a product of the faith shared in that church. Their love is handed down in prayers. Even though we don't have fresh memories, they

See **Remains**, Page 5

Julia M. Dendinger | News-Bulletin photos

The ancestral remains found during the Historic Belen Bioarchaeological Project were reinterred at the Our Lady of Belen cemetery by Father Albert Mutebi Ssekabembe and parish deacons on Feb. 21.

Patsy Torres, far left, was one of the Belen residents who were key to bringing researchers to the city of Belen to study the site of Plaza Vieja, the location of the original Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church. The ancestral remains found during the excavation were reburied at the cemetery of the current church.

Remains: Archeologists hope work will continue in the Hub City to discover history

from **PAGE 1**

are still with us."

Twenty plain white banker boxes containing the ancestral remains were stacked at the front of the altar of the church, where they received dashes of holy water and were wreathed in the smoke of incense. In attendance were members of the field crews who came to Belen to unearth the history of Plaza Vieja and its people, including co-primary investigators Dr. Pamela K. Stone and Dr. Debra Martin.

The project finished in the summer of 2023 and did verify the Wisconsin property was indeed the location of the first Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church, with a large section of its original stone foundation documented.

'I call it fate'

Years before the project began, Sisneros found himself at the Belen Harvey House Museum hoping to find some kind of documentation about Plaza Vieja. He overheard a woman talking to her granddaughter about their family history.

"I started a conversation and asked her if she knew where the older, historical part of Belen was. She smiled and said she lived there, and proceeded to show me a 1905 map exhibited in the museum," Sisneros said in 2017.

On the map was a rectangle labeled "Old Town Church Ruins." That started Sisneros on a six-year journey researching every primary document, secondary publication or oral history he could find on the early history of the area that became Belen.

That woman at the museum, Patsy Torres, was the first cousin to Alberta O'Neal, the owner of the property where the foundations of the old church lay beneath the dirt.

"When I met Samuel, some might call it happenstance but I call it fate," Torres said. "This is a dream come true."

As a child, she remembers her parents talking about a church but didn't hear any real details, often shooed outside to play.

"I always wondered, 'Was there really a church there?,'" she said last week.

Her aunt, Valentina "Tina" O'Neal — Alberta's mother — was so sure the church had once stood on her property that she built a "museum of memory" at the location, complete with an outdoor altar.

Church archives show the first Our Lady of Belen was built in 1793 and recorded its last burial in 1861. That same year, a new church and cemetery, were built next to the 10th Street location, where the current and third Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church stands.

While church records recorded who was interred at the old church, there are no records of exactly where those individuals were buried on the property, a situation that led to many remains becoming intermingled. During the excavation to look for the foundation, Stone's field crews did find what are called articulated remains — skeletal remains that are still grouped together as they were buried and belong to one person — in the area that would have been inside the church walls.

"They were in the center of the church, which is a highly respected, sometimes purchased, place to be," Stone said. "But there is limited space, so every time you have a new interment, you are potentially dis-articulating something."

Stories the bones told us

Knowing they were welcomed into the community by the descendants of the very people they would be unearthing, Stone and Martin were very cognizant they might well be asked to stop their project.

"This project, which is actually kind of unheard of and really unique, it's really the way we should be doing this type of work. When we've presented papers at conferences over and over again, we've said this is how you do it. This is how you do community-engaged archeology," Stone said. "The people have to be included in everything you do, and they have to be able to say, 'Please don't do that.' And when they say don't do that, you don't do it."

When the first fully articulated remains were found, work stopped immediately, and Torres and O'Neal were asked if they wanted to continue, she said.

"The stories the bones told us, luckily, the community wanted to know," Martin said. "Patsy and Alberta very much wanted to know how did these people live?"

The bones showed people were injured and healed, were ravaged by scurvy, a severe deficiency of vitamin C. They showed devastating epidemics of small pox, measles, diphtheria, viral influenza and pertussis.

Church records show in the summer of 1816 something swept through the community of Belen that led to the death of many children. Excavations at the old church site recovered three children laid to rest together at the same time at the very front of the church — the place for the los angelitos.

"As Deb said, these epidemics came through and you think about what it meant to have kids then. And yet, there are people who lived until old age and many children who survived. That's why we have all these families here," Stone said. "It's the memories of these people that made all this possible. I think that's really important, particularly for this community."

The torch is passed

Growing up, when Loren DeAnda would ask her grandmother about her ancestry, she was told she was Spanish.

"I knew there was more than that. I would look in the mirror when I was younger and I didn't think I looked all that European," DeAnda said while waiting for the memorial Mass to begin last week.

Curious about her origins, DeAnda began studying the genealogy on her mother's side of the family and found ancestors as far back as the 1700s, some of who were buried at the old church, just three blocks from where she grew up.

Marriage records of her ancestors show they are Spanish, Mestizo and Indigenous, with many classified as genizaro or coyota and coyoto — the coded language of the time for the caste system that indicated they were slaves and servants.

When the tents went up at the Wisconsin Street property, DeAnda contacted Sisneros and began learning more about the church and her ancestors.

"We were taught to reject our Indigenous heritage, but there were still a lot of things, traditions that were passed down that were not necessarily European," she said.

Now she knows she comes from people known for their survival and resilience, some of who were bought and sold at auction, taken from their communities, from their language, and relocated against their will.

"This has been incredible, life changing," DeAnda said. "I'm very excited to see what the DNA studies show."

Dr. Rick Smith, George Mason University, Indigenous STS Lab and faculty of Native studies at the University of Alberta, collected samples from the ancestral remains uncovered during the excavations and DNA samples from living descendants in the community.

Smith said the hope is to eventually let community members know how much of their genetic makeup comes from the Belen ancestors.

The remains, as well as the samples taken by Smith, were reinterred at the cemetery last week, along with a handful of clay beads found during the excavations.

"There are no artifacts," Stone said. "People were buried with nothing. I think there were maybe five clay beads. There were no grave goods whatsoever."

Even though the project has ended, Stone hopes the work won't stop.

"We're really hoping the historians and people like Samuel, who started all this, can maybe establish the property as a heritage site. You have so many rich, family stories about this community. What we found is not the whole story. It just adds to yours," she said to community members.

"If somebody has a question about the project, they are welcome to contact me. I might not have the answer but I might be able to direct them to one. For now, the torch is passed on to the community."

Stone can be reached by email at drpkstone@gmail.com.

OBITUARIES

Emilia Baca

1925-2025

Emilia Baca, 99, of Tomé, passed away on Feb. 15, 2025.

Services will take place on Monday, March 3, at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, beginning with a visitation at 9 a.m., followed by a Rosary at 10 a.m., and Funeral Mass to be celebrated at 10:30 a.m. Interment will take place at 11 a.m., Tuesday, March 4, at the Santa Fe National Cemetery.

She was preceded in death by her beloved husband of 65 years, Odelio Baca, of Tomé; her parents, Estevan and Aurelia Lopez; and her siblings Benito, Amalia, Lugarda, Lucia, Manuel, Espiridion, Filimon, Eluterio, Onesima and Eduardo.

She is survived by her brother, Estanislado; her daughters, Victoria Baca and Bernadette Pumper (Charlie); her granddaughter, Vanessa Callahan; as well as numerous loving nieces and nephews.

Special thanks to her devoted caregiver, Mary Sparks, who provided love and care for the last eight years of her life.

Emilia was born in Pueblitos, the second youngest of 12 children. She married Odelio in 1947 after he returned from World War II.

Emilia earned a bachelor's degree in social work from New Mexico Highlands University. She began her career with the New Mexico Department of Health and Social Services in Las Cruces, and served as quality control manager upon her retirement.

Following retirement, Emilia and Odelio returned to the family home in Tomé, where she remained active in her community.

She was a devoted member of the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church and the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Emilia was also active in the Valencia County Republican Party and served on the board for the New Mexico Department of Corrections under Gov. Gary Carruthers.

Emilia's heart was always centered in the Lopez family, where she provided constant support, love and inspiration. She will be deeply missed by her family, friends and all who had the privilege of knowing her.

Please sign Emilia's online tribute at romerofuneralhomenm.com. Romero Funeral Home, 609 N. Main St., Belen.

Josie Dolores Chavez

1937-2025

Josie Dolores Chavez, age 87, a resident of El Cerro, went home to meet her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ on Feb. 17, 2025.

Services will take place on Friday, Feb. 28, at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, beginning with a visitation at 10 a.m., followed by a Rosary at 11 a.m. and Funeral Mass to be celebrated at 11:30 a.m. Interment will follow at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Cemetery.

Josie was born in Adelino on March 19, 1937, and was a member of the Immaculate Conception Church in Tomé. She was the daughter of Celedon and Elena Chavez.

Josie married Ramon A. Chavez in 1955. They were married for 42 years when Ramon passed away. Together, Ramon and Josie raised six children. Josie was a housewife who really enjoyed decorating her house for the holidays. She also enjoyed sewing, reading, family get-togethers, matanzas and going to the casino.

Josie was known for her delicious, homemade tamales, posole, beans and chile. It seemed that she always had something made as she would send her visitors home with containers of food.

Josie was a loving mom, nana, great-nana, sister and friend. Her family and friends will certainly miss her hospitality and gatherings.

Josie was preceded in death by her parents, Celedon and Elena Chavez; three sisters, Ramona Montoya, Rosie Hurbina and MaryLou Martinez; four grandsons, Anthony Chavez, Joseph Brandt, Gabriel Salazar and Wayne Salazar.

She is survived by her six children, Joseph (spouse, Cathy), Elaine Garcia, Yvonne Jones (spouse, Keith Jones), Celedon (spouse, Deborah), Roseanne Romero (spouse, Severo Romero) and Ramona Sanchez (spouse, Leroy Sanchez); and her sister, Dolores Gabaldon; 17 grandchildren, 21 great-grandchildren, sister-in-law, Betty Spanglerl and many nieces, nephews, cousins and friends.

Pallbearers are Ray Chavez, Lawrence Chavez, Anthony Chavez, Celedon Chavez Jr., Eric Salazar, Anthony Castillo, Carlos Castillo, Severo Romero and Melokei Chandler.

Please sign Josie's online tribute at romerofuneralhomenm.com. Romero Funeral Home, 609 N. Main St., Belen.

Gloria Flores (Reyes)

1938-2025

Gloria Flores (Reyes), 86, passed away on Feb. 8, 2025, in Albuquerque.

Born on Sept. 14, 1938, Gloria was a devoted Catholic, who found comfort in reciting her rosary every night. She was a loving mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, a great friend and a woman of immense kindness and warmth. Her sweet and caring nature touched the lives of many, making her truly one of a kind.

Gloria leaves behind her son, Joe M. Saiz (Lissa); daughter, Melissa Saiz; grandchildren, Gabriel (Jaelyn), Serena, Jacob and Olivia; great-granddaughter, Scarlett; many nieces, nephews and cherished friends.

A special thank you to Janelle, Arielle, and Diana for helping keep her healthy and making her laugh her last few months. Her presence brought joy to those around her, and she will be deeply missed by all who knew her.

A funeral service will be held Thursday, Feb. 27, at Noblin Funeral Service Chapel in Belen. A visitation will begin at 10 a.m., followed by graveside service at 12 p.m. at Our Lady of Belen Cemetery.

May Gloria's memory bring comfort to those who loved her and serve as a reminder of the kindness she shared with the world.

Frank Saiz

1931-2025

It is with heavy hearts that we announce the passing of Frank Saiz on Feb. 15, 2025, at his home, with his family by his side.

He was a beloved father, grandfather, great-grandfather, brother, uncle and friend, whose kindness, wisdom and love left a lasting impact on all who knew him.

Born on Nov. 10, 1931, in Magdalena, Frank lived a life full of love, hard work and devotion to his family. He was known for his career in wrestling, building and his great sense of humor. Whether he was working on a project, sharing stories or guiding loved ones with his wisdom, his presence brought warmth and strength to those around him.

He is survived by his children, Francisco Saiz, David Saiz, Rudy Saiz and Rachel Romero; and his grandchildren, Francisco Saiz, Anastacio Saiz, Jerry Saiz, Timothy Saiz, Rita Saiz, Felicia Romero and Monique Romero, who will forever cherish his memory and carry on his legacy.

He was preceded in death by his beloved wife, Rita Saiz; and his parents, Maximillano and Teresita Saiz.

A service to honor and celebrate his life will be held at a private location, as requested by Frank.

Frank will be deeply missed but never forgotten. His love, wisdom, and the countless memories he leaves behind will continue to inspire those who knew him.

Betty Rita Tapia

1945-2025

Betty Rita Tapia, age 79, a resident of Los Lunas, passed away on Feb. 20, 2025.

For service times, please visit romerofuneralhomenm.com.

She is survived by her loving husband of 33 years, Orlando Tapia; daughters, Bernadette (Don) and Jolaine (David); son, Marc (Heidi); stepdaughter, Tabitha (Keith); nine grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren and one great-great grandchild.

Betty is preceded in death by her parents, Santos and Leonides Gonzales; daughter, Anna Lisa Sanchez; brother, Elfigo Gonzales (Sonny); and sister, Elaine Gonzales.

She worked for the Los Lunas Hospital and Training School and Sequoyah Adolescent Treatment in Albuquerque until she retired. Betty was also a school bus driver for Los Lunas for many years.

She was a member of Sangre de Cristo Catholic Church in Valencia, Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Peralta and most recently Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Tomé.

The urn bearer will be Orlando Tapia, and the honorary urn bearers will be all of her grandchildren.

Please sign Betty's online tribute at romerofuneralhomenm.com. Romero Funeral Home, 609 N. Main St., Belen.

Gwinn: Former mayor known for his passion for Rio Communities and residents

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ing to remedy that, there were other issues that made his recovery difficult," Dzuik said. "He was starting to recover, but when Covid happened, everything went in reverse."

Born in Belen in 1951, Gwinn grew up in the Hub City and his family moved to Rio Grande Estates (Rio Communities) in 1964. He graduated from Belen High School in 1969. He also achieved the rank of Eagle Scout.

He attended Western New Mexico University on a golf scholarship, where he played for the university's golf team for four years. Gwinn graduated college in the spring of 1973 with a bachelor's degree in physical education and psychology.

In August 1973, Gwinn began his long career with the Santa Fe Railroad as a

munity, and he was looking to get more services into Rio Communities," Dzuik said. "The issue back then was that the county didn't have the resources for the residents. Incorporation was just a way to get more resources into the area, to fix the roads and parks."

The last effort to incorporate Rio Communities was the third time it was attempted. The incorporation was approved by a vote of 672 in favor to 391 against — 63 percent to 37 percent.

"This is a great, great moment for us," Gwinn said at the time of incorporation. "We are off and running onto the next step ... People are ready to move forward ..."

Dzuik said while she's grateful people remember Gwinn as someone who led the charge for incorpora-

times when he and Gwinn would run trash detail once a week.

"A lot of times, we would be out picking up trash — tires, mattresses or whatever was out there — in the desert," he remembers. "He would use his old truck and I'm not sure where he took it but he would make sure it was cleaned up."

Winters, who has served on the city council, the economic development committee and the planning and zoning commission — twice — hasn't been able to visit with Gwinn for more than five years due to his illness.

"I miss talking to him, and he always had a different perspective of things, which is always good" he said. "He tried his best to do things for the city, and not everything was perfect,

people. He was the salt of the earth.

"He always treated me with a great deal of respect, and he will be missed," Auge said. "He did many good things."

Robert Chavez, who was appointed to the city council by Gwinn after another councilor resigned, said he remembers meeting the former mayor in 2013.

"I met Mark when I was assistant principal at La Merced and he was involved in the school's parent organization," Chavez remembers. "It was after that that he asked me to be involved in the city.

Chavez said Gwinn enjoyed being involved in his community, and wanted to be inclusive of everyone and invited them to be involved in any decision made for the city.

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